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ABSTRACT

This speech describes two research studies, one that investigated the role of the superintendent in collective negotiations as perceived by school personnel, and the other that compared the attitudes of selected school personnel from Indiana and Michigan concerning the role of the principal in collective negotiations. Data collected from the first study revealed that important differences exist among rural and urban school personnel when compared with central city school personnel relative to the role of the superintendent in collective negotiations and the scope and structure of the negotiations process. In the second study, four groups or types of people were identified and classified by beliefs: educational managers, anxious participators, ambivalent participators, and educational bystanders. (Author)

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THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATIONS

by

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With the advent of public employer-employee "professional negotiations," in the early 1960's, the phrase as a term, implied to describe, meet, and confer. Throughout the decade, as the process became more sophisticated in the public sector, and particularly in the educational scene, the term became known as, "collective negotiations." In both cases the expression represented various forms of bargaining for terms and conditions of employment. As we move into the 70's collective negotiations, per se, seems destined to represent the bargaining procedures in all areas of the public sector.

The proper place or designated niche of the public school principal within the regular structure of a typical school district and in like manner within the scope of collective negotiations evolved into and remains even today an unresolved dilemma. Ewald Nyquist, Commissioner of Education in the State of New York, justifiably and eruditely, has termed the man and the office, "A Stranger in Paradox." A principal on probation seeking guidelines for permanent status might even hasten to admit his position borders on the ascription of a pathetic fallacy.

In the late 60's, several of the states had passed laws in respect to collective negotiations in the public sector. These laws granted employees the right to bargain and construct mutually arrived-at agreements with their employers in regard to terms and conditions of employment. In a broad sense,

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the same laws allowed educational institutions and constituents to draw up teams and choose sides. With their fingers, knuckles, and thumbs blanching white on the negotiations ball bat; public school administrators, for confrontation purposes, sat down on one side of the bargaining table (either square or round) and teachers seated themselves on the opposite end. Superintendents of schools aligning with boards of education classified their colleagues as members of the management team (administrator - board - employers). Classroom teachers, in the formation of bargaining units from their local membership associations, began the affiliation power game with state and national organizations (NEA, AFT) to become the labor team (teacher - faculty - employees.)

In the middle of this morass of shuffle to contrast and compare, the building principal of a school district discovered, unfortunately, that his allegiance had been placed on the chopping block. In retrospect, should he become a member of the management team whereby the administration of policy and the supervisional aspects become his main responsibility? Should he uncouple his loyalty to the superintendent which demands a strict adherence to administrative directives? When, if at all, should the principal choose the bargaining position of being represented by the teachers' association with whom he works daily during the operation of their particular educational facility? Is it an administrator's privilege to allow teachers to bargain for him? Are managerial and confidential employees (supposedly principals) excluded from any kind of bargaining representation? Has a principal the inherent right for personal and/or professional determination of authority, and if so, can he be permitted exclusive examination of his options? Why shouldn't a principal

be allowed to prepare a list of priorities for job mandates and decision-making?

Too often, among the lot of school building principals, the selection of choice has been one of individual bargaining for survival and self-determination. Too often the responsibility factor of a number of the jobs has as an alternative the acceptance of a kind of semi-management type of duty rather than a professional authority of office. With hat in hand, how many principals have had to accept a quasi, sans sanction, working type arrangement with the teachers of his balliwick? How many principals have divided and hacked themselves into pieces in order to cover all bases? Have we forgotten so soon a lesson from our historical past that a house divided against itself cannot stand? Ironically, the middle-management people (principals and administrators) are not often consulted during collective ne_otiations, do not negotiate for or standby during the bargaining sessions, and are only peripherally involved during the whole agreement-making process. However, the aforementioned middle-management must deal with the negotiated contract on a day to day basis for the entire school year or the number of designated days agreed to by the parties involved.

Being a five fingered fork has become a part of the principal's position in his feast of duty. Breaking bread with separate individuals who confront his authority livens his plate of life. The assumption of the new role promotes dealings of immediate consideration. Working in a practical manner of alleviation may in time help the principal to resolve the scope and structure of collective negotiations. Mercurial as it is, bargaining may eventually

provide a sanction for unrealized goals and the utilization of factors for shaping the principal's importance. Undoubtedly, the many contract elements contain vital ingredients for maturing relationships and ultimately will shape the structure of his office. The existing range between the practical shop steward and a viable professional educator will involve many a shake-down cruise.

Professor Urich's unpublished dissertation at the University of Iowa in 1967, entitled, "The Role of the Superintendent in Collective Negotiations as Perceived by School Personnel," analyzed by Q-sort methodology 20 school districts.[1] With an N total of 80 teachers, board members, and superintendents of schools; he discovered two types of people which he termed "Localites" and "Metropolites." The localites were composed of the following: 71 per cent rural teachers and 79 per cent urban teachers; 84 per cent rural board members and 100 per cent urban board members; and, 67 per cent rural superintendents and 100 per cent urban superintendents. This combined group of respondents limited the role of the teachers' organization in policy determination of the educational program. Likewise, this type of school personnel was hesitant about sharing responsibility for developing a quality educational program and qualifiedly undecided about the teachers' organization being the appropriate mechanism to accomplish needed improvements in the conditions of work. May not one say, by inference, that this portion of the study indicated through omission that the unmentionable principal is the unnamed correspondent? Who should (in a school system of any size) create the educational atmosphere and issue interpretative proclamations stemming from policy to the teaching staff? Who, except the principal, is responsible for the organization,

supervision, and overall accountability of teachers, pupils, and curriculum? What person is responsible for the interpretation of the school's philosophy which is to be integrated into the everyday nut and bolt procedures? Who else but the principal is witness first hand to the school system's needs? In the principal's component part of the total school program, is he not expected to maintain status quo and initiate change among tangent parties? Can one expect subordinates, coordinates and ordinates to aid and advise the principal who in turn must bear the brunt of the board of education, the superintendent of schools, and the self-serving interests of teacher associations? The principal has been accepted as an arm of the superintendent for too long a time. As a catalyst, the principal's image is not only blurred, but the current reflection in the negotiated mirror has been cracked far beyond the hope of attempted repair.

The type identified as "Metropolites," were far more conscious of the salient implications of the collective negotiation process in education. This group comprised 83 per cent of the central city teachers, 84 per cent of central city board members, and 100 per cent of central city superintendents. They were more willing to recognize and adapt to the collective negotiation process as a technique of sharing responsibility in the decision making process. The main conclusion of the study was that there were important differences in attitude among rural and urban school personnel as compared to central city school personnel concerning the role of superintendent in collective negotiations. Again, wherein lies the role of the principal? What emerged, either by non-committal origins brought about by the confines of the study (i.e., superintendent, teacher, board members) or lack of interest and omission of

choices. Ten per cent of the Q-Sort items made reference to middle-management and the administration but not one choice was included in the array of items most accepted by the Metropolites. However, two items with respective Z-Scores of -1.31 and -1.04 were among the array of items most rejected by the Metropolites. The statements were: Superintendents and administrators dominate the operation of the local teachers' professional organization and administrators and supervisors should be excluded from the voting unit that represents teachers. Both of these items point out conclusively what the Metropolites would not like to see happen, but in reality one suspects the conditions existed at that time.

The entire study suggested that there was still a considerable amount of professional solidarity among education personnel at the idealistic levels. The major differences appeared to be concerned more with technical or procedural matters rather than in terms of overall purpose. Also indicated was the tremendous need for a study to be conducted with regard to middle-management. It is obvious the principal in the exercise of his options between the school board and superintendent of schools on one side and the teachers on the other side will be by-passed by both. In his initiating of alternative measures within policy boundaries, he has not developed as a person nor has his position improved in the sophisticated development of collective negotiations. As teachers have moved from primary needs in the scope of negotiations to their welfare needs, the principal playing a piggy-back role to the teacher associations has lagged woefully behind.

In a study at Purdue University (August 1970), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and in cooperation with the Purdue Research Foundation, "The Role of the School Principal in Collective

Negotiations," was examined in greater detail.[2] Similar in construction to the previously mentioned study and using the Q-methodology as the research procedure, an N of 224 educators - (45 superintendents, 87 principals and 92 teachers), from twenty-one school districts in Indiana, and twenty-five in Michigan (total 46 emerged into four distinct types or groups of people. Type one was classified as "educational managers." Type two as "anxious participators." Type three became "ambivalent participators," and type four group was called "educational by-standers."

The type one respondents, "educational managers," were composed of superintendents and building principals who categorically viewed the principal's role in collective negotiations as representing the board of education. Eighty-nine per cent of the administrators from Indiana and Michigan did not want the building principal to belong to the voting unit of the teachers' association. And they did not want him to be represented by the local teacher organization. Nor did they want the principal to negotiate with the board of education about educational or economic matters which concerned his own interests and his own particular beliefs. The group represented the principal's position as being in some kind of limbo-liaison between the board of education and/or superintendent, and the teacher organization.

Type two school personnel, namely, "anxious participators," were made up of 53.6 per cent secondary school teachers, and 10.1 per cent elementary school teachers. The total number, 63.7 per cent, believed that the term "quality education," should be brought about by collective negotiations and that a teachers' organization should assist the school board in determining

educational policy and educational program. Also, they felt the bargaining process, of necessity, should subsequently be defined in a written agreement. Despite the acceptance of collective negotiations as a carrying medium for conditions of employment within school systems, the type two group of respondents placed the principal in a neutral position of disengagement. Again, the place of middle-management represented a state of lending no active assistance to either side, hence, indifferent in poise, and, therefore, belonging to no one.

Respondents contained within the type three group, " ambivalent participators," contained the largest number of female teachers, (mostly elementary), 47.5 per cent, viewed the principal's role as being a consultant to the teachers' organization, and a member of the voting unit which represents teachers, rather than act as a representative of the school board. A somewhat conservative group, in terms of action, they were willing to feather the nest but were not willing to be responsible for obtaining the appropriate conditions or the feeding of the worms. There were no superintendents and only eleven principals who were identified in the type three group.

Members of the type four school-oriented persons represented individuals that included the smallest number of persons (9.4 per cent) of the total number of school personnel who participated in the study. Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents of this group were administrators. Labeled "educational by-standers," because of their reluctance to become involved with the central office staff, and their limited involvement with teachers' organizations, these kinds of people are usually in concert with other educators known as the

"piggy-back" club. This type of individual represents persons who ride at the center of the herd, accepting gratuitously negotiated benefits heaped upon them. A similar kind of person has an inclination to lean in one direction and can be classified as charter members in the local agency shop. The type four oriented individuals believed the principal should be represented by the local teachers' organization during all phases of the collective negotiation process. Believing that administrators and teachers still have similar concerns when engaged in the education of children, they undoubtedly felt that the local teacher organization could best express all-inclusive mutual interests. Though they may have felt a desire to decrease the widening gulf between teachers and administrators, the indicator here was a naivete of even the preliminary knowledge needed to understand the bargaining function in the public sector. Again, the type four group of persons believed the school principal should be allowed to negotiate with the school board in regard to his terms and conditions of employment. They did not recognize that his position presented a conflict of interest by allowing him to be represented by the teachers' organization.

The study clearly indicated that among school personnel in Indiana and Michigan, the person's position within the structure of the school system was the most significant variable in determining the role of the principal. Each party to the placement of the position wanted to see the principal a part of the component family of the school district, but did not want to identify the principal, personally or categorically, with the respondent's own current status. Each party was agreeable to a neutralization of the role, a blending f ee from the tinges of impingement, chemically, neither acidic nor basic.

But, what is a neuter principal? He is seen also as a helper, a consultant, and a semi-teacher. The principal cannot be all things to all people. Undoubtedly, this is why there are so many principals in placement offices.

Ultimately, the school principal will be fully recognized, provided, however, he establishes and sustains the job responsibility and functions properly amidst a high degree of accountability rather than carry on according to how others see they think he should function.

Momentarily changing from the conceived position of the principal to the actual responsible role, administrative and supervisory personnel during the 70's will be unconditionally involved in some phase of collective negotiations. The size of a particular school district has significant bearing on the consideration. The superintendent, in all but a few instances, has released the reins of negotiation to anyone competently willing to drive the horses: the school district lawyer, the business-manager, the assistant superintendent, the hired negotiator and/or the principal. In the realms of deliberative thought, with respect to job responsibility, and the agreement, the role of the principal or middle management emerges as a crisis factor position in educational collective negotiations, irrespective of the tattooed arrangement currently existing in his regard. Someone has to implement the words of the contract. Someone has to measure performance in the educational sector. It is middle management. It can be no other category.

Middle-management people in educational collective negotiations at the bargaining table are described as resource people, silent observers, note takers, chief negotiators and members of the negotiating team. Here again,

they have been willfully cast aside. Though each component part of the school district expects the principal to be something of its choosing, or nothing of its acceptance, the principal is finally relegated to a storage shelf for annual school board member inventory.

Contract negotiation, standards of consistency in agreement construction, training and responsible supervision of current administrators with regard to emerging issues, updating of sophistication, certification requirements and regulatory procedures, and adequate curriculum presentations at preparatory institutions are all in a state of widespread confusion. Each school district, in turn, attempts to keep pace with new legislation, jurisdictional decisions, local bargaining and changing concepts.

In summation, as long as the posture of school district principals continues unresolved, and as long as middle management is prone to accept and sustain an attitude of unwillingness, with regard to the position of a management-oriented responsibility at the bargaining table, the role of the school principal in collective negotiations will remain a Rosetta stone of alternatives incapable of solution.

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